

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 157 651

RC 010 618

AUTHOR Grosse, Reg
TITLE Outdoor Recreation and Education for the Mentally Retarded.
PUB DATE [75]
NOTE 20p.; Best copy available
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Activities; Adults; Attention Span; Camping; Experiential Learning; Group Experience; *Mentally Handicapped; Mental Retardation; *Outdoor Education; Participant Involvement; Physical Characteristics; *Program Descriptions; *Program Development; Program Evaluation; Recreation; *Residential Programs; Self Esteem; *Skill Development; Social Characteristics; Social Development
IDENTIFIERS *Craig State School NY

ABSTRACT

A year-round outdoor recreation and education program for the moderately and severely retarded begun in 1972 at Craig State School in Sonyea, New York, is summarized in this report of development of the program, its success, and recommendations for the future. The program builds progressively from a nature trail hike to a day camping program one day a week for six weeks, to overnight camping in a public park area. Overnight and day camping experiences covered include both summer and winter recreation. The report briefly describes residents taking part in the first year (IQ, age, physical condition, social characteristics), hiking and camping activities, and participation levels. For the day camping, a day-by-day summary is provided, with recommendations that camping at this level should be coed for good group interaction and that residents should be carefully selected for compatibility, be scheduled and available for the six consecutive weeks, and be dressed in suitable clothes and shoes. Evaluation of the overnight community camping experience indicated that the public exposure and community living experience was invaluable to residents. Benefits showed by participants included improved attention span, new skills, development of group spirit, physical improvement, and growth in self-confidence. Suggested solutions to problems encountered by staff are contained throughout.

(RS)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED157651

Outdoor Recreation and Education
for the
Mentally Retarded

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Reggie Grosse

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

By: **Reg Grosse**
Recreation Worker
Craig State School
Sonyea, New York

[1975]

RC010618

Outdoor Recreation and Education
for the
Mentally Retarded

Outdoor recreation and education should be taught to the severely and profoundly retarded in a progressive manner. The program at Craig State School starts with a walk on the nature trail. The staff provides this activity for the residents that seem to like the out of doors and are observant of things around them. The residents must be able to walk; but, a good sense of balance is not necessary because this skill will soon improve with repeated walking over uneven ground and around obstacles that are encountered in the woods.

Residents that show interest on the nature trail are then referred to the back packing and day camping program. This program is set up to give the residents six days of training one day each week for six consecutive weeks.

The residents that continue to enjoy the out of doors and have shown improvement during the day camping program are then moved to the next step on the learning ladder. This is an overnight camping experience in a public park area. This program is designed to expose the resident to other camp experiences and to community living in the out of doors.

Those residents that are able to function satisfactorily in these situations are then involved in a camping and community living experience for a period of time that the staff feels best meets the needs of each individual resident. In some cases, it will be for two days or for as long as a week. Hopefully after this progressive learning experience the residents would be able to attend many types of camping experiences and derive hours of pleasure from such activities.

The following is a summary of the results of the various phases of our progressive outdoor education program.

Nature Trail

The nature trail is located in a wooded area on an old abandoned road and part way on a side logging road. It takes about one hour and 15 minutes to walk there, approximately two miles total distance. Stationed along the way are various signs with points of interest on each sign. We have a key which each leader of the group will read at each station to elaborate on the specific subject.

The Occupational Therapy Department made the signs for us and they also made and painted some birds that we have placed in various places to add interest. Many other things can be done, and will be in the future, to improve and make a more interesting nature trail.

As each group goes through the trail the leaders must observe the residents and look for certain traits. First, how interested the resident is in the out-of-doors. Second, how much the resident observes on the trail. Third, can the resident get along with the rest of the group. Fourth, would the resident benefit from more out-of-doors education in the back packing and day camping programs.

The nature trail provides a good physical exercise for the residents and is stimulating to most of the residents who participate. Recreation is not the only department that uses the trail, it is open to any service who would like to take residents on an outing and work in the out-of-doors.

The out-of-doors is a vast school of different experiences that all people can learn from. What you gain from it, depends on how you use it to enrich your life and the lives of others. It is an environment rich in thousands of different learning opportunities open to those who will take the time to simply reach out and accept this natural world.

BACK PACKING

AND

DAY CAMPING

In the summer of 1972, the Recreation Therapy Department of Craig State School conducted an experimental back packing and day camping session for the mentally retarded.

* * * * *

David Dempsey once said about our hidden environment, "Saint or misanthrope, success or failure - what you are can be shaped by where you are." One of the keys to the success of an outdoor camping program is the total environmental change that faces the participants. The outdoors provides them with a natural environment that is physically challenging, and provides a free and open inner feeling. This, in turn, will add to the uninhibited use of one's imagination, sense of touch, smell, sounds and color.

They physical exercise performed adds to one's sense of balance, judgement, and large muscle development. The free and open feeling will help in relieving the tensions and anxieties which residents face every day in the institutional environment. Socialization is a lesson constantly taught in the outdoors. We must all share and help each other in the group to promote a feeling of accomplishment and achievement. It is a real opportunity to learn by doing, which is a sound education practice for the M.R.'s, or anyone else.

The camping area is located in a thickly wooded area, along a creek, southwest of Craig's boundary. It is accessible by hiking, about one and a half miles through dense woods along an old unused dirt road. The camp area itself is on an abandoned railroad bed along a winding creek. It is level, has high banks, and a quiet beauty of its own. There is room enough for a picnic area, kitchen, fireplace and "biffy" or toilet. This area was completely undeveloped when we started the program.

At the onset of the program, specific goals were drawn up as guidelines. We

felt that they were realistic, and geared to the residents' needs and capabilities. We decided to try two different mental levels of residents: Group I, severely retarded, I.Q. - 20-35, and Group II, mildly and moderately retarded, I.Q. - 53-69. Each group was to attend camp once, each week, for six consecutive weeks. (We reasoned that at least one trip would be lost to bad weather). The program was designed to be as basic as possible, provide a learning experience for the residents, and a chance to accomplish the skills needed to help himself and the group.

Some of the tasks assigned were: hiking with a back-pack, helping set up camp, cutting firewood, building the fire, helping with preparing the meal, helping clean up, and work on a camp project. Other skills such as lashing, nature hikes, socializing and singing were also part of each day at camp.

Setting up the groups to participate was our next problem. We decided that Group I would consist of severely retarded residents, and co-ed. Group II, all men, moderately retarded. We felt that this would be a good test of the program, and would help us in forming other groups in the future. The six residents were to be accompanied by two recreation personnel or a 3 to 1 ratio.

Group I was selected, and a brief sketch of each resident follows:

BOB: Good physical condition, I.Q. - 31, age 35. He likes to sing, visit and is very observant and active. Bob is a good group member, loves attention, and is willing to try new tasks.

DAN: Good physical condition, I.Q. - 34, age 42, has a severe speech problem. He is good natured most of the time, but can be upset and stubborn. Dan is observant and aware of new things around him. He can solve problems if given a chance, and will try to please you. He is a good group member, and very open and friendly toward new acquaintances.

DICK: Good physical condition, I.Q. - 21, and 41. He is more of a loner, and tends to hallucinate a great deal. He is observant and is constantly looking or exploring

anything new to him. Dick is more capable at work tasks than many would believe. He is not as responsive in a group but will get along in most cases.

SHIRLEY: Fair physical condition, tends to be overweight and has poor sense of balance. She is a constant talker and perseverates speech, I.Q. - 34, age 38, good natured, willing to try new things and is observant of new surroundings. She is a good group member but seems to need attention from others.

GERRY: Seemed to be more intelligent than the other residents and accomplished tasks at a fast rate. She is in good physical condition and mixes well with others.

SANDY: Good physical condition, I.Q. - 45, age 23. She can have sudden mood changes and has difficulty in taking turns. She wants immediate gratification or will get upset. Sandy is a behavior problem and needs close supervision.

JOYCE: Good physical condition, I.Q. - 30, age 24. She is rather physically inflexible, and balance at times is poor. Joyce is quite even tempered although stubborn at times. She works well with a group and if given time, will try new tasks at her own pace.

The following is a day-by-day account of the camping trips for Group I:

GROUP I

July 7th

We left the Green at 9:00 a.m. with Dan, Dick, Bob, Joyce, Shirley and Gerry.

(Gerry was later to be replaced by Sandy to better balance the group. Gerry was more intelligent and tended to manipulate the rest of the group).

Everyone carried back packs and shared the work load. When we reached the area, they helped saw wood for the fire and gathered stones to lay up the fireplace. All were willing and eager to try to help the group. After the fire was going, we prepared dinner with the residents' help. After dinner, we all helped clean up and socialized. We arrived back at the cottages about 3:15 p.m.

When they first started walking into the woods they couldn't cope with small problems such as mud puddles or fallen tree branches that barred the way. They would wait until I led them through; but, on the way back, they would go ahead and on their own find ways around these obstacles.

At the campsite, they were very shy and uncertain in conversation and actions with the opposite sex. After dinner, we sang a few songs and then allowed them to visit with each other without interference from the staff. Result was: free, uninhibited song, laughter and conversation for the remainder of the trip. In fact, they asked if the same people could come again next time; they are a very compatible group, except for Gerry, and enjoy each others' company.

July 14th - Cancelled - Rain

July 21st

A new girl was added to the group, Sandy replaced Gerry. She is a behavior problem and needs discipline and close supervision. The group got along extremely well and accepted Sandy. She loves the outdoors and was willing to help and please us. Shirley's walking and coordination has noticeably improved over the first trip, and she quite readily picked up lashing skills. Bobby was very helpful, and Dick helped with the sawing without being asked. Dan helped when he could and was very observant of the woods environment.

July 28th

This proved to be an interesting day for behavior. The boys knew what was expected of them and worked well with a minimum of supervision. Dick and Bob were near me and watched every move. They wanted to help split the kindling for the fire; and, we allowed every resident, girls included, to have a turn at it. There was a feeling of unity or a pulling together of the group. The walking ability of the group has improved considerably and they can really move-out, walking with packs over rough ground.

August 4th

This is a most enthusiastic group. They are excited and ready to go from the time you pick them up til we return. They greet and accept each other with open friendliness. They all helped at camp tasks and took pride in their project of helping with the serving table. Dan has really opened up, and is trying to talk more than I have ever seen him, and I have worked with him on and off for 5 years. He is still not able to speak so you can understand the words well, but some words are becoming more clear, and at least he is trying to communicate more through speech. Sandy is still our behavior problem. She is good most of the time, but will grab things away from other residents and hand them to us. Sandy is capable of doing many things and will behave well enough to be in groups if supervised properly. She seemed to become better able to share with the other residents, due to peer pressure from the males (especially from Danny and Bob).

Joyce and Shirley refused to go to the creek area until this trip. They were fearful and apprehensive about it; but, they did go down with the rest of the group. They refused to put their feet in the water as the other members of the group did, but the recreation staff felt that eventually they would have accomplished it, if the residents were able to continue for a few more weeks.

August 11th - Cancelled - Rain

GROUP II

Group II consisted of six men with an I.Q. range of 21 to 85.

JOHN: Good physical condition, I.Q. - 21, age 37. He has poor speech and is very difficult to understand. John is a willing person but is cautious of new experiences. He is even-tempered and a good group member.

WREN: Good physical condition, I.Q. - 49, age 18. He is easy-going and pleasant to work with; but seems to lack confidence. Wren is even-tempered and a good group member.

EUGENE: Good physical condition, I.Q. - 72, age 31. He is alert and capable of many tasks; but, seems to be a little lazy. He complains about things and does not have any enthusiasm for camping.

WALT: Good physical condition, I.Q. - 85, age 42. He is capable of many tasks and will work up to a point. He is more interested in sports than camping. He enjoys group participation and was a good group member.

WILSON: Good physical condition, I.Q. - 42, age 27. He is more of a loner, but will help when directly asked. He tends to be content watching; but, doesn't like to try new things on his own.

SHELDON: Good physical condition, I.Q. - 61, age 35. He has problems getting along with his peers, and gets upset quite easily. He does not mix well with a group and is constantly complaining. He gives up easily and does not like to try new things. Camping is not his "bag".

The following is a day-by-day account of the camping trip for Group II:

This is a much different group from Group I. They are all able to talk well, except one. They can learn at a quicker pace and follow directions fairly well. We have decided that with their help and abilities they should be kept as busy as possible. We will try to build a different project each week to improve the camp and give them a feeling of accomplishment.

The first project was a tripod wood rack to keep the firewood dry. This was accomplished by lashing the poles with binder string. Three of the boys learned this task easily and did a fine job with the assignment.

July 25th

The boys were eager and waiting to go on their second trip. They talked of their previous craft project of building a wood rack and were ready to start another project.

This time we decided on a pole frame shelter over the picnic table for protection from the rain, as well as shade on hot, sunny days. It proved to be a good choice, as we no sooner got it constructed and the plastic tarp up when it poured buckets of rain and hail. The residents took the storm well and no one was frightened; they seemed to get satisfaction in knowing they were protected by a shelter they helped make; and were very content to sit out the storm in under it. Dinner was delayed about a half hour, but no one complained.

August 1st

Two of the residents, Eugene and Wilson, had to see the doctor; this may have been an excuse. This group is more split. They can perform well individually; but, the unity of the group is not there. The interest in camping and helping the group has dropped off. I think that this is caused by the feeling that it is more like work to them now than fun. They are expecting fun and games from our department; instead they are having to work at walking and packing, helping to prepare lunch, cutting wood, and helping build projects. This is not the image of recreation as they know it. They are the type of resident that prefers games, trips, sporting events and being entertained by others. If there were facilities and time for games, along with their work, they would be more receptive.

August 8th

This proved to be a problem day. One of the residents went to Boy Scout Camp. Two residents seemed to have lost interest and refused to go, saying they didn't feel well. One resident went out to work for the day. We had to substitute four new men for the day; they all had a good time, and enjoyed the day, but the learning experience is very limited on one trip.

August 15th - Cancelled - Rain

On September 29, October 6, 13 and 20 we took another group of residents. These were three women from the Aster division and three men from the Letchworth

division. The group performed very similar to Group I. It proved to be a good learning experience for all participants, and the group performed well as a unit.

The first year of the Camping Program was exciting and rewarding, both for the residents who participated, and the staff. I feel that some definite ideas have come forth as a result of it. For example, the program is designed for residents' needs at a level that many of our severely retarded can attain. The program is simple, but basic, and because of the variety of tasks, their attention span was increased considerably. A noticeable improvement in judgment and self-confidence was noted along with a better sense of balance and physical condition.

We learned a valuable lesson from Group II about how important our group selection was and that weekly attendance was essential if they were to learn the tasks assigned.

The following recommendations seem essential for the success of future camping at this level:

1. Co-ed groups, for good group interaction;
2. Careful selection of each group, for compatibility;
3. The residents programmed must be scheduled and available, for six consecutive weeks;
4. The residents should be dressed in clothes and shoes suitable for the trip

I would like to recommend that the present program be continued for 1973, at the present level for the severely retarded. I also recommend that we purchase the necessary equipment, such as backpacks, cooking equipment, rain outfits, and other small items. If possible we would also use better toilet facilities at the camp area.

I would like to thank the Program Planning Committee for permitting us to attempt the program, and special thanks to my co-workers who helped so diligently with the project.

For once you have been a camper
Then something has come to stay
Deep in your heart forever
Which nothing can take away,
And heaven can only be heaven
With a camp in which to play - Mary S. Edgar

Community Camping

On July 25 and 26, 1973, three members of the recreation staff, Mr. Rizzo, Mr. Grosse and Mr. Valentino accompanied six male residents on an overnight camping experience. Residents for the community camping program were chosen for various reasons. Dick and Dan were included because they had completed six different day camping trips and they had done well with tasks and assignments. It was felt they were ready for the next step. Sidney and Alfred were chosen because they lack self-confidence and need a little push toward mixing with others. They both need help in looking ahead to the next task and doing it without being directed. They follow directions well but lack the confidence to try something new. Ken and Paul were chosen because they had camping experience with the Boy Scouts. We felt that they would set an example and serve as leaders to the other residents. The goal of the camping program for Ken and Paul was leadership training. In similar situations our staff has learned that residents tend to learn faster from each other and show more interaction than employees can achieve during short time periods.

The residents involved in the program were all physically able and had the following intellectual abilities: Ken, Paul and Sidney - moderate mental retardation, Dick, Dan and Alfred - severe mental retardation.

It was extremely important to know our residents needs and to key the type of camping experience being provided to their needs. The severely retarded who would receive a great deal from day camping and back packing would enjoy doing simple tasks in an overnight camping situation. The satisfaction of being able to help would serve as a reward.

The moderately retarded residents would express more complicated needs and these could be met as in the case of Ken and Paul where they were called upon to be leaders.

Throughout the camping experience the residents who had been involved in earlier training (nature trail, day camping, back packing) exhibited that they were able to remember past training and experiences. They were able to unload the equipment

properly, they knew how to wear the back packs, they were able to walk about the woods freely with a sense of security; and, they were able to perform routine camp tasks.

A review of the day went something like this: Everyone helped unload and set up the tent and the dining area. After lunch we cleaned up and each resident was assigned a task. Some of the tasks were keeping the water jugs full, taking care of the trash, storing gear and washing the tables. We then journeyed to the swimming area, where the residents observed the pool area.

We then traveled back to the camping area and took the group to the recreation hall and play area. The men enjoyed meeting other campers and joined in the playground activities. Dan loved to ride on the merry-go-round. The children accepted him and let him ride and enjoy himself. Some of the group used the swings, teeter-totters and climbing bars. After about an hour of play, we all went for a walk around the camp site area looking at the camp trailers and trucks. Arriving back at our camp site, we had a rest period and began preparing our supper. Along with their assigned tasks, the residents sat at the table and helped start the fire. Everyone then washed up and supper was served. After supper all pitched in and helped clean up for the evening activities. The group went to the recreation building and everyone joined in a game of kickball. The men's behavior was excellent throughout the evening activities; and, it was a rewarding experience for everyone. About 10:00 p.m. we took our flashlights and started back to the camp area. The group was fascinated by the lights peaking through the trees from the other camps. It was time to turn in, so everyone washed up and crawled into his sleeping bag. The staff had decided to stay up in shifts to keep an eye on things and make sure everyone was O.K., for the evening. This proved to be one of those ideas that sounded sensible, but didn't turn out quite so well. One of the residents would not go to sleep.

Dick couldn't get settled down. We moved him from the tent to the back of one of the pickup trucks and back to a tent of his own; but, he would not lie down. He finally sat in a chair between us; and, we covered him with a sleeping bag for the

remainder of the evening. We stayed awake til morning, Dick being the most alert of all. Needless to say, breakfast was ready by 7:00 a.m. and the men were called to get cleaned up and ready to eat.

We decided that if we had been able to get Dick to use a sleeping bag back at his cottage, and better prepared him, this might not have happened. This was the first time he had ever experienced these sleeping conditions. The change was more than he could handle. We all feel that he should be allowed to try again; but, we should try to get him more acquainted to sleeping in a tent and sleeping bag. Other than this, he was well behaved and derived a great deal from the trip.

After breakfast, we broke camp. Everyone helped pack up tents, equipment and supplies. We had made friends with some of the campers and the men said their "good-byes". We left the camp area clean and ready for the next campers to move in. The group arrived back at Craig about 11:30 a.m., tired, but with a warm feeling of accomplishment. It was a great educational experience for all; and, an effort well worthwhile.

The public accepted the group in a warm and friendly manner. Everyone was super to us and were very responsive and understanding. They were happy to see the residents have the opportunity to participate in a camping program and thought it was gratifying to see them having such a good time.

The staff had a 'get together' to evaluate the program and made the following recommendations: It was decided that if it was possible, we would like to extend the camping for at least a two week period, changing every day so that more of our residents could enjoy such an experience. Because of the facilities and activities that are available to the group, we feel that this area is an excellent choice. The public exposure and community living experience is invaluable to our residents, if handled properly. We feel we have the staff and could get enough help from other areas to do a good job for a two week period.

It would be possible to plan a complete camping program and involve other disciplines to specialize with residents that need extra help in development while at camp.

We are lucky that we have such a wonderful area as Letchworth Park so near to us. The facilities are exceptional and the administration at the Park have shown interest and cooperation which should be commended.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all the people who helped make this camping experience possible. This could be an important stepping stone for our residents toward community involvement and a fuller life.

CABIN CAMPING AT LETCHWORTH STATE PARK

To extend our outdoor program into the fall of the year, and enjoying the beauty of the seasons' colors, in October 1973 we rented a cabin for our residents at Letchworth State Park.

Six male residents were taken for the day, and one night. The next morning another group of six male residents were brought to the park and the first group returned to Craig.

They were assigned tasks to be responsible for, and a recreation program was worked out to fit the specific needs of the group.

The staff carefully observed different interactions and some of the observations were: the residents need, on the average, at least one day and night to be accustomed to the new environment. It was observed that at the end of their allotted time, they had just begun to "get in the swing of things", relax and build up enough self-confidence to try new skills.

It was also noted that the men's behavior was highly influenced by a female employee assuming the 'mother' role in the cabin. This was the nearest thing we have found to a home setting. They would look to her for direction and help, far more than they would to the men. She added a great deal in completing the feeling of a family unit to these groups.

Again our only problem was at night when some of the residents couldn't sleep and adjust in this new environment. I feel it is to be expected, as this was the first time they had slept away from the institution in many years.

The residents 'over all' response and willingness to help was terrific, they fully enjoyed the experience and many asked when they could go again.

This type of camping would particularly be enjoyed by some of our older residents who need a quiet, peaceful environment.

WINTER DAY CAMPING AND OVERNIGHTS

Because of the acceptance and positive response of the summer and fall camping, we set up a winter program to round out the year in Outdoor Recreation and Education.

Again we found ourselves at Letchworth State Park utilizing their winter recreation area. With the cooperation of Mr. Don Saltsman, Regional Administrator of the Genesee State Park and Recreation Commission, and his able staff, we set up the following program.

January through March each Tuesday we took 40 different residents, to the park to hike, ride down hill in saucers and large innertubes, play outdoor games on the ice rink and for a snowmobile ride. They took box lunches and spent the day at the winter recreation area. Also included in the program were four different overnight trips for 10 residents each trip.

Mr. Saltsman and his staff extended the use of the new winter lodge at the ski area in which we stayed during the night.

One of the highlights of our winter program was a 3 day trip to Raquette Lake at Camp Huntington, owned by Cortland College. Six residents and staff participated in a working winter workshop held there. Wilton State and Rockland's Children's Psychiatric Hospital also participated at the workshop. Some of the new skills our residents participated in were cross country skiing, snow shoeing, ice fishing and winter hiking on the woods trails.

The winter day camping and overnights at Letchworth Park provided the constant learning experiences that are faced in the outdoors. The overnight camping provided a working ratio of staff to residents that made it possible to carry on many projects that large groups could not realize. They collected nature materials that were used to discuss nature's many facets. They were interested in all aspects from identifying different trees and flowering parts to the way water and wind had eroded the banks of the gorge. Craft projects were made from materials collected to form nature centerpieces and other art forms. They also learned how a rope could be made from

tree bark. The companionship and working together with new interests in a stimulating environment was brought home time after time. Attention spans were increased and good behavior patterns were noted in almost every case.

In conclusion, we now have a year round outdoor recreation and education program at Craig State School geared to our residents needs.

We have learned that the out of doors provides us with unlimited learning opportunities and that our residents have enjoyed and benefited far more than words can tell.

We would like to thank all the people at Craig, at Letchworth State Park, and at Raquette Lake, that contributed a sincere effort to help us, and make possible the success of such a year round program in Outdoor Recreation and Education for the Mentally Retarded.

Sincerely,

The Recreation Department

of

Craig State School

Reg Grosje
Recreation Worker